

Five Essential Concepts for Understanding the Archaeological Past and Its Wise Use

Cultural Systems are the Focus of Anthropological Study.

1. All humans have the same basic needs, which are met in culturally distinct ways.
2. Culture enables people to adapt to social and natural environments.
3. Culture enables people to change these environments.
4. Aspects of culture are interdependent.
5. Culture changes constantly, reflecting and shaping a number of forces.

Awareness of the Past is a Fundamental Element of Archaeological Study.

1. The Americas have been home to hundreds of cultures for at least 12,000 years.
2. Since many bygone cultures left no written records, they can only be studied by examining the physical evidence that they left behind.
3. These material remains - such as sites, artifacts, and structures - are part of a nation's cultural, or heritage, resources.
4. Archaeological, ethnographic, and historical resources add a unique dimension of understanding to cultural studies.

Archaeology is the Scientific Study of Cultures, Based on Their Material Remains.

1. Archaeology is a subdiscipline of anthropology, which is the comparative study of humankind and human behavior.
2. It is multidisciplinary.
3. It follows scientific process.
4. It is a science of content and association.
5. It employs a range of specialized tools and methods.
6. Data derived from archaeological study can provide unique insights and a sense of time and depth to other disciplines.

Humans Affect and are Affected by Cultural Resources.

1. Cultural resources provide us with a perspective on our own time and place, and an understanding of cultural diversity.
2. The past is a shared heritage that is valued by different people for different reasons - including scientific, aesthetic, spiritual, social and political, commercial and economic, consumptive and non-consumptive, and intrinsic reasons.
3. Societies have different approaches to ownership of the past.
4. Cultural and social trends partially define cultural resource issues. Among the contemporary issues are:
 - the rapidly changing nature of science and its applicability to archaeology;
 - Native peoples' activism;
 - sensitivity toward the treatment of human skeletal remains;
 - growing avocational interest in the discipline;
 - curation of artifacts and samples; and
 - trafficking in antiquities.

Stewardship of Archaeological Resources Saves the Past for the Future.

1. Cultural resources are subject to myriad destructive forces, both human and natural.
2. Cultural resources can be protected and managed for a variety of uses, and many governmental agencies in the United States mandate their protection.
3. Wise management depends on a broad knowledge of the resources that are present and the questions that the past can help to answer.
4. Everyone can be involved in managing and conserving cultural resources, locally and globally, based on their values and behavior.
5. Individuals have an obligation to weigh the consequences and impact of their actions on the irreplaceable evidence of past cultures.

Excerpted from *Guidelines for the Evaluation of Archaeology Education Materials*, prepared by the Formal Education Subcommittee, Public Education Committee, Society for American Archaeology, 1995.